

TJJD Staff:

I want to bring all of you up to date on developments that have taken place during the past week. TJJD Chief of Staff Chelsea Buchholtz represented TJJD yesterday (Thursday) before the Senate Finance Committee and presented our long-range vision for the continued evolution of our agency. She told the members that the agency would like to begin any transition with a study to determine how to move from our current configuration to a model that utilizes smaller, regional facilities that will keep youth closer to home. She also stated that we envision a six-to-eight year timeframe for developing and implementing this model. Chelsea did a wonderful job and her presentation was well-received by members of the Finance Committee. No decisions were made. This was the beginning of the conversation on the Senate side.

I want to make a few clarifying comments on my long-range vision for the agency. First, I want you to know that the proposed move to different state-operated facilities is not a reflection on you. It is a reflection of the system we have—which has inherent challenges for us today. Our greatest asset today is our workforce—each of you. You rise to the challenges of our system and give your heart to your work. You change the lives of kids. I am proposing this shift to regional facilities to fix the system, not you. You do not need fixing. I believe in what I am proposing as being the best way to serve kids well in the future.

House Appropriations budget workgroups also began this week, including the workgroup for Article V agencies, which includes TJJD. There was very little discussion of our budget primarily because more extensive conversations will be taking place about the long-term vision for the agency. However, these workgroups will continue to meet and our staff will diligently monitor these meetings. I will report to you when anything of substance develops that could impact our operations.

Our senior staff continue to have discussions with legislators and their staff about our current and future operations. I'm happy to report that we are generally well-received during these visits. Members and staff seem supportive of our efforts.

This past Wednesday in Giddings, I met with our facility superintendents, some of their assistant superintendents, and senior education leaders to discuss what we are hoping to accomplish this legislative session and our vision for the future. I appreciated the opportunity to get everyone together and believe we had a good open dialogue on the long-term vision for the agency as discussed in my Feb 23rd email to you.

I expect more discussions to begin taking place at the Capitol next week as we work with legislative leaders on our agency structure and our budget. These meetings will likely be informal meetings in legislators' offices. I promise to inform you of all new developments. I know the legislative session is stressful but I urge all of you to remain calm, disregard rumors and continue to dedicate yourself to our mission of improving the lives of our youth. I will provide you with weekly updates to ensure you remain informed as the legislative session moves forward.

David